

## Wilmot Cattle Company



5<sup>th</sup> September 2022

Committee Secretary  
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee  
Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Secretary,

**Inquiry into the adequacy of Australia's biosecurity measures and response preparedness, in particular with respect to foot-and-mouth disease (FMD)**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the Committee's inquiry.

The matters below are provided for the Committee's urgent consideration.

I would be pleased and prepared to attend a hearing of the Committee to elaborate on any of the matters in this submission, if requested.

Wilmot Cattle Company (WCC) is owned by the Macdoch Ag Group and has an ethos of innovation and a desire to restore the ecological function of its farmed landscapes in a profitable way. WCC spans four properties across the New England region of northern NSW and grows pastures under sustainable, productive and profitable management. Grazing cattle and selling them for meat is the predominant income stream for WCC. The company is valued in the vicinity of \$100m in turnover and asset terms.

As the Committee is aware, the current outbreak of FMD in Indonesia, including on the Island of Bali, has caused alarm within our company and among other rural and regional communities. An outbreak of FMD in Australia would affect not only those who have a direct reliance on raising livestock, but also those working in upstream and downstream businesses such as the multitude of service providers including processing, transportation, veterinarian, livestock agents, animal health providers, and extending to schools, other regional service industries and the concerned public.

In addition to the broadscale societal concerns, in direct monetary terms a FMD outbreak would threaten Australia's livestock and agriculture industries that contribute well over \$80 billion to the Australian economy each year. Livestock, including cattle, sheep, pigs, goats and deer make up a significant portion of gross farm gate revenue.

WCC believes that, right now, and notwithstanding the significant positive and genuine effort Australia's quarantine and border officials are making, FMD in Indonesia poses the biggest threat the Australian agriculture industry has seen for over a hundred years. It puts 150 million livestock at risk, particularly given there are over 24 million feral pigs in Australia that do not have much respect for a quarantine boundary.

Authorities and other experts know that it will *only take one case* of FMD on our shores to precipitate an unprecedented catastrophe within rural and regional Australia.

Based on FMD experiences elsewhere – such as the UK FMD outbreak in 2001 which saw 6.5 million livestock euthanised at a cost of £8 billion – an outbreak in Australia would, virtually overnight, shut down our livestock sector. This, in turn, would lead to a crash of domestic markets and a flow-on depression of rural land values and the viability of Australian farmers.

In trade and reputation terms, Australia would lose its FMD-free status and our international trade relationships will be instantly ruptured, which will take decades to restore.

Added to this is the prospect of a huge mental health toll.

WCC would like to place on record its gratitude to the Federal and State authorities for the actions they have taken in recent months to respond to the current Indonesian FMD threat.

However, given the dire and wide-ranging and economy-wide implications of an outbreak, WCC believes much more need to be done.

WCC therefore urges the Committee to consider and recommend additional stringent quarantine inspection and related border measures, including the following relatively urgent actions at, and in relation to, the protection of our borders and our affected industries:

1. Given the rising prevalence and severity of animal-borne diseases globally, the Australian Government should significantly increase the **budgetary allocation and funding priority for biosecurity management** and associated protections in Australia;
2. Customs, biosecurity and border officials be given the mandate to impose an **immediate ban on all food imports under 10kg** upon detection of an FMD incursion in any country from which passengers are arriving into Australia. The same principles should apply to other highly-destructive disease threats such as African Swine Fever and BSE;
3. The timely installation and **implementation of more advanced x-ray technology** and procedures, subject to successful trialling, with the ability to detect organic matter more proficiently;
4. The **implementation of additional profiling around the destination postcode** of incoming travellers. For example, those proceeding to a regional or peri-urban postcode could be automatically directed for detailed luggage inspections or screening by sniffer dogs;
5. Implementation of new protocols that require **luggage inspections of every traveller returning from Indonesia** until and unless the current outbreak is brought under control, as certified by an independent international animal health and quarantine authority;
6. An **urgent review of the adequacy of the compensation package** as outlined in the current AUSVETPLAN. Rather than being a fixed dollar amount, WCC recommends compensation

calculations be made proportionate to the current market value of livestock prior to the biosecurity incursion. This will allow for fair and equitable compensation relative to movements in the market value of livestock.

7. **Additional training of customs and quarantine personnel** to undertake more in-depth questioning of incoming passengers specifically around FMD risks;
8. Urgent **amendment of the statutory Incoming Passenger Card** to include additional questions on overseas farm visits, and affording additional scrutiny of this declaration in the baggage hall and exit points by roving Biosecurity Officers;
9. Inclusion, at airport international arrivals entry points, **a sniffer dog at the direct exit line** working beside the officer inspecting the Incoming Passenger Card and making the determination as to which way that passenger is directed. We understand this is a measure that would be supported by Department staff;
10. Additional **sniffer dogs to be deployed at airport baggage carousels**, subject to an appropriate risk assessment to protect the dogs from being injured by, for example, a luggage trolley, heavy suitcase, or passengers not watching where they are going;
11. **Distribution of a bespoke, subject-tailored letter outlining the severity of FMD** as a disease and recommending best practices to avoid its transmission, to be given to all *outgoing* and *incoming* passengers where a known FMD destination is included on that passenger's forward or past itinerary.

I would urge you to please consider instigating the following measures as soon as possible.

In addition to these specific and urgent border/entry measures, WCC encourages the Committee to recommend additional public research funding be allocated to FMD treatment and prevention, including vaccines and other biotechnological innovations.

Yours sincerely,

Stuart Austin

General Manager

Wilmot Cattle Co

Contact details:

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